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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the psychological effectiveness of cooperative small group learning among junior college students with less than 11th grade skill levels. Three English classes, reflecting the overall student population, were chosen. All classes met three days a week and had the same instructor and out-of-class assignments. Two of the classes had small group study sessions one day a week, instead of traditional teacher-lead classroom instruction and discussions. Group membership and the roles of note taker and group spokesperson rotated each week. During the final weeks of the term, all classes were returned to the traditional style of instructor-lead discussions. Students who had been involved in the small group study sessions asked more questions and offered more responses in all class discussions than students who had not been involved in the group work. The small group classes passed the course with 15% more A's and B's, showed more improvement in writing and grammar skills, and seemed better able to complete the writing assignments. The small group interaction also seemed to help returning adults and disabled students participate more freely and eased their transition into the traditional teacher-controlled classroom. It was concluded that, when used in conjunction with whole class lectures and discussions, cooperative learning groups can be a very effective teaching tool. (EJV)

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COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATION

A Study of Group Interaction

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11th Annual Symposium on
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Catskills, New York
April 17-19, 1988

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COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATION:
A Study of Group Interaction

While several studies relating to cooperative learning and behavior modification in small groups can be found in psychology and socialogy journals, these studies analyze psycho/ social group interaction in therapy sessions (Zahn, 1986), (Anderson, 1985) and (Lew et al , 1986). Groups are studied as an educational tool mostly at the primary grade level (Tama, 1986) and (Nevin, 1984). Little has been studied concerning the effect of group interaction on the secondary educational level. This paper will assess the psychological effectiveness of group study in two equivalently eleventh grade junior college classrooms using a third equivalently eleventh grade non-grouped classroom setting with a parallel student population as the norm.

PROCEDURES

Three English classrooms were selected for their size and their student population. Each class had twenty-five students at the inception of the Fall semester. The student population in class A had 6 students over age 20 and 19 students between 17 and 19. Class B had 7 students over age 20 and 16 students between 17 and 19. Class C had 9 students over age 20 and 16 students between 17 and 19. These figures are somewhat reflective of the school's

overall population ratio of returning adults to older teenagers.

In addition to the age analysis, other group dynamics were also involved. Each class had at least two disabled students. Disabilities included dyxlexia and physical impairment. This too reflects the overall population of the school. Even though the study was conducted in a community college, the GPE was an average of 10.4. The three classes studied were part of the Developmental English Improving College Writing I curriculum. One of the classes was part of a Freshman Strategy Seminar pilot program involving students who required developmental reading, writing and college arithmetic.

Classes A and B were designated as the variables for the study of grouping and its effect on attitude and retention. Class C was the norm reflecting the traditional teacher-lead classroom instruction and discussions. Classes A, B and C each met three days a week (M W F) and had the same instructor. Classes A and B were told independently their classes would have group study sessions every Wednesday beginning during the fourth week of class. All classes were given a list of instructor objectives and procedures for the semester. The same out-of-class assignments were given to all classes.

METHODOLOGY FOR GROUP DYNAMICS

The instructor determined the population of each group by establishing five groups of five students. The initial groups consisted of at least one returning adult (age 20 or over) in each group. Each week thereafter, for a total of six consecutive weeks, the groups were altered so that at least two members of one group went into another group. In this manner, each group had at least two people who knew each other from the previous week. Since it is true that psychotherapy groups should be composed so that each member is compatible with at least one member of the group (Stava & Bednar, 1979), the groups in Classes A and B were arranged in a similar manner.

Students were given short reading assignments prior to class. The reading selections were taken from a text titled Patterns Plus, Delmar Press. The text is arranged in topical order according to the writing task to be accomplished. Comparison/contrast paragraphs and short essays are presented as springboards for students writing. Prior to class, each student was to try to prepare at least four questions based on his/her reading. The questions were to be either related to the reading itself or to the type of writing task which was to be accomplished based on the reading assignment. Students were to keep their questions in their own notebooks which were checked periodically. Prior to the group sessions in class, the students were told to share their questions with the each other.

During the Wednesday class sessions, the instructor set a limit of time for the group discussion so that cooperative input could be shared with the class as a whole for the last part of the class hour. The instructor asked that one person (group determined or if the group was undecisive, instructor appointed) to take detailed notes on the group discussions, writing both the student questions and the group responses to those questions. Note-taking and test-taking skills were covered prior to the inception of groups, during the first three weeks of school.

RESULTS

As with Parker's study relating to "Small-Group Cooperative Learning" (1985), the students in Classes A and B, the social level in the classroom was increased dramatically. In bi-weekly one-on-one tutorial sessions for each student, individuals related to the instructor points of interest to him/her which were discussed during group sessions. During weeks ten through fifteen, all classes were returned to the traditional style of instructor directed discussions. Students who had participated in the groups in Classes A and B were more interactive by asking questions and offering responses in the whole classroom than they were in Class C. Disabled students added freely to discussions during the fifth week of school in Classes A and B while in class C the disabled population seemed more hesitant to offer responses until the nineth week of school. This accounts for the increase in student

questions for Class C during the nineth week (See Class A, B and C Charts). Anderson's article (1985) reflects similar observations of group activities nurturing disabled student participation in a main-streamed classroom setting.

The impact of cooperative learning in a regular classroom (Nevin, 1984) reveals that students who interact with their peers are better able to cope with the material covered in the classroom. Classes A and B not only were able to formulate and respond to questions concerning the material covered, they also passed the course with 15% more A's and B's. Grades were assigned according to the student's ability to write at a college level based on criteria determined by the English department as being essential for writing in a college composition course. The main focus was on organization of material, sentence structure, grammatical usage and punctuation. Their writing skills and understanding of grammar were enhanced through their interaction with each other. Their writing improved to the next pre-college level (non-degree credit). Forty percent of the students in Class C required extra work with their writing to reach the second semester level of pre-college writing.

The returning adults were of various ethnicities so comparison with Warring's study (1985) was imcomplete. The returning adults had intersting interaction with the teenagers in Classes A and B. On a cognative level, both groups became one unit during the last five week of

school.

Interaction between older students and younger students was not on a domineering adult/ receptive child basis as it seemed to occasionally evolve in Class C. Verbal interchanges became more familiar and colloquial in the classes where smaller groups had been instituted. Yager (1985) assessed the group-to-individual transfer and also found individual achievement in psychotherapy groups. Parker (1985) also found improvement of academic and social aspects when small groups were instituted.

Just as the returning adults were eased into a typical instructor-led school room setting, so too were the disabled students. After the groups had been instituted and the students returned to a typical teacher-controlled classtoom, the disabled students were encouraged by other students to say the answers to questions. The group dynamics increased in classes A and B and to an outside observer, they might have been considered a bit louder than Class C.

Group interaction evokes speaking up without waiting for a leader to call on someone. Ideas are freely expressed when students become familiar with one another. Fear of rejection is less likely when students feel that their ideas can be stated in an ostensibly less intimidating atmosphere. It is, in fact, only five people with whom the student discourses, rather than a more substantial number of twenty-five. Johnson (1979) assessed the dynamics of discussion in 64 classrooms and was able to conclude that

teacher stimulated student interaction in largely populated classrooms has a direct effect on interpersonal relations of students. Those students who tended to be more introverted had tendency to become more introverted when questioned about assignments in front of their peers. Those students who showed more agressive tendencies at the inception of the course tended to be even more so at the conclusion of the course. Mink (1979) in his study of the psychology of internal and external loci of control suggests the use of group therapy in the classroom. The Scandinavioan study (Egerbladh and Sjodin, 1986) concerning the effects of group composition, group norm and group behavior as compared to individual responding reveals similar cooperation of individuals within a group setting.

It should be noted that no one was particularly enamoured with the notion of taking notes during the group sessions. Most students did so rather reluctantly. During the inception of the grouping, scapegoat scenarios were observed. A scapegoat scenario might occur with one person (usually female) would be asked to be the group secretary. This occurred during the first two weeks of group sessions. During subsequent weeks, students who tried to choose a female in the group to take notes were instructed to choose another individual from the group for this task. Everyone in the class eventually had an opportunity to be a group note-taker. Group focus on a scapegoat is also reported by Stava & Bednar (1979) as one of the outcomes of initiating

encounter groups.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown that even in psychotherapy, not everyone benefits from groups (Anderson, J., 1985). The utilization of groups in a classroom setting should be used as a suplimental teaching technique, not as a technique exclusive of other methods. Class C did show improvement even without the use of groups but 40% of the students in Class C required supplimental tutorial work to bring them to the next level of developmental writing. Classes A and B showed that group interaction involving sharing questions and answers helped them relate more to the writing assignments. The interaction with peers imprinted positive attitudes toward themselves as students, toward each other as peers and toward school as an effective place to learn new concepts or reinforce old ones.

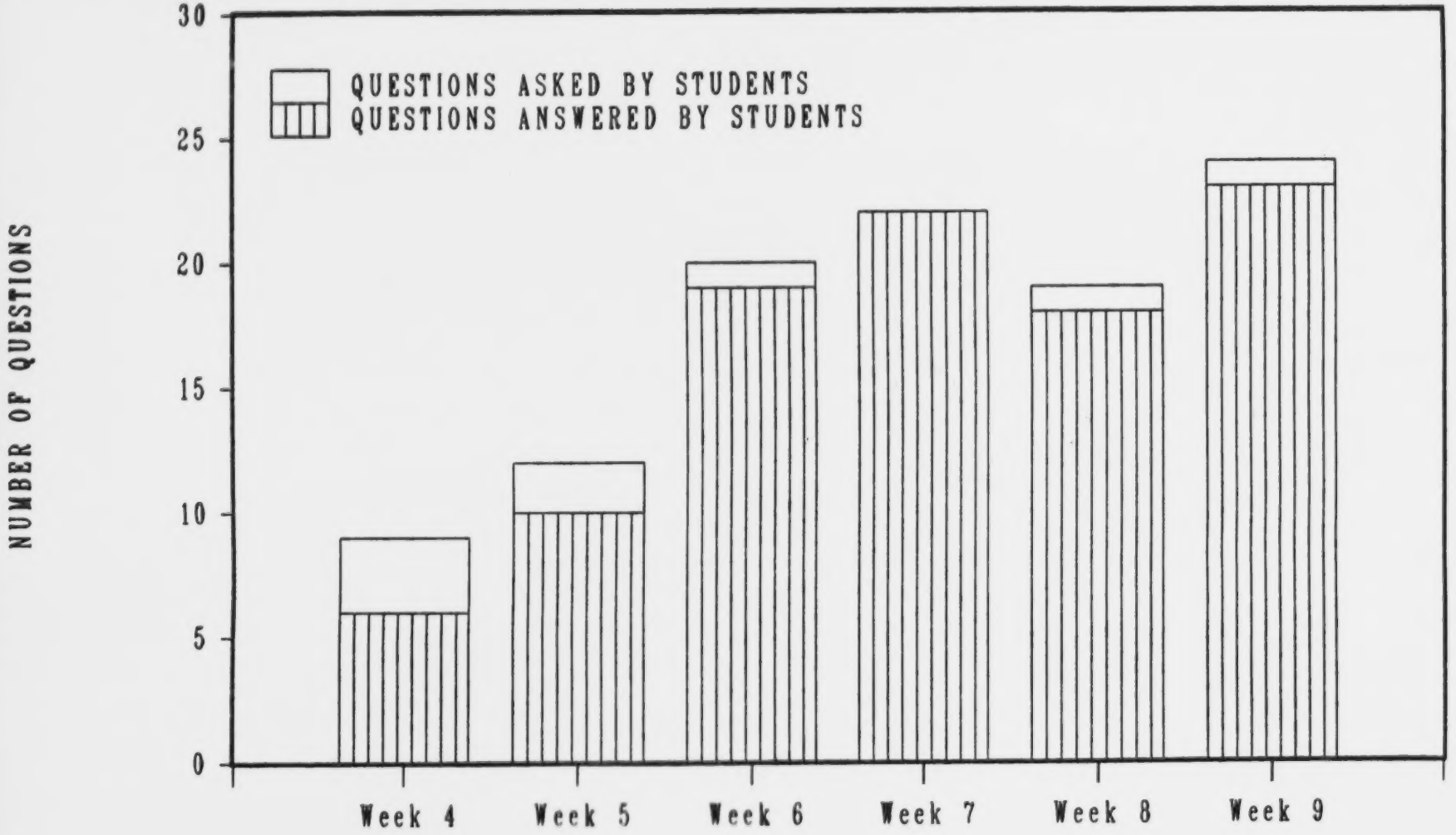
The myth that everyone can benefit from a group experience should be dispelled (Anderson, J., 1985). Groups can be effective if properly formed. It is the correct composition of the group that assures effective outcomes. The leader of the individual groups is not the omniscient overlord. Classes A and B purposefully had different members, alternate scribes and varied spokespeople so that one voice did not dominate the discussions. Changing groups for different exercises so that students became familiar with all classmates promoted comradery. Maintaining at least two of the previous class session's group members

prevented the evolution of neglected isolates or scapegoats in the group.

Group instruction is a subtle melding of material to be learned and personalities to learn it. As in psychotherapy, it must be with special care that groups are formulated and utilized so that the positive effect of student interaction can be experienced. A classroom which utilizes only groups can become as monotinous to a student as a classroom which only has lectures. When utilized in conjunction with whole class lectures and discussions, cooperative groups can be a very effective teaching tool.

What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen?	Narration
What does it look like? What are its characteristics?	Description
What are some typical cases or examples of it?	Exemplification
What is it? How does it resemble other members of its class? How does it differ from other members of its class? What are its limits?	Definition
How did it happen? What makes it work? How is it made?	Process
Why did it happen? What caused it? What does it cause? What are its effects? How is it related to something else?	Cause and Effect
What are its parts or types? How can its parts or types be separated or grouped? Do its parts or types fit into a logical order? Into what categories can its parts or types be arranged? On what basis can it be categorized?	Division and Classification
How is it like other things? How is it different from other things?	Comparison and Contrast

CLASS A


QUESTIONS ASKED BY STUDENTS
QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY STUDENTS
NUMBER OF QUESTIONS
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25
20
15
10
5
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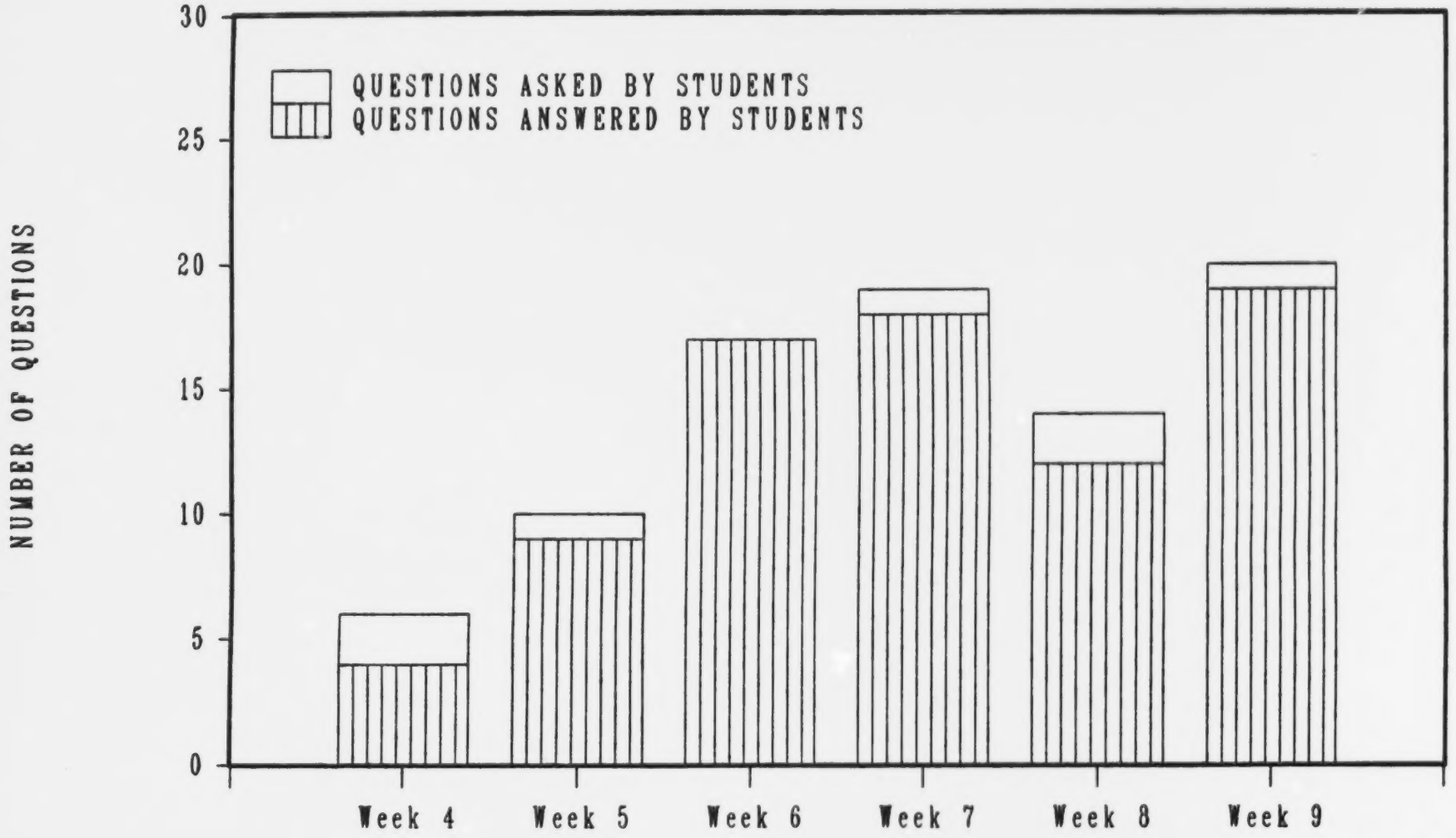
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7
Week 8
Week 9

CLASS B


NUMBER OF QUESTIONS
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25
20
15
10
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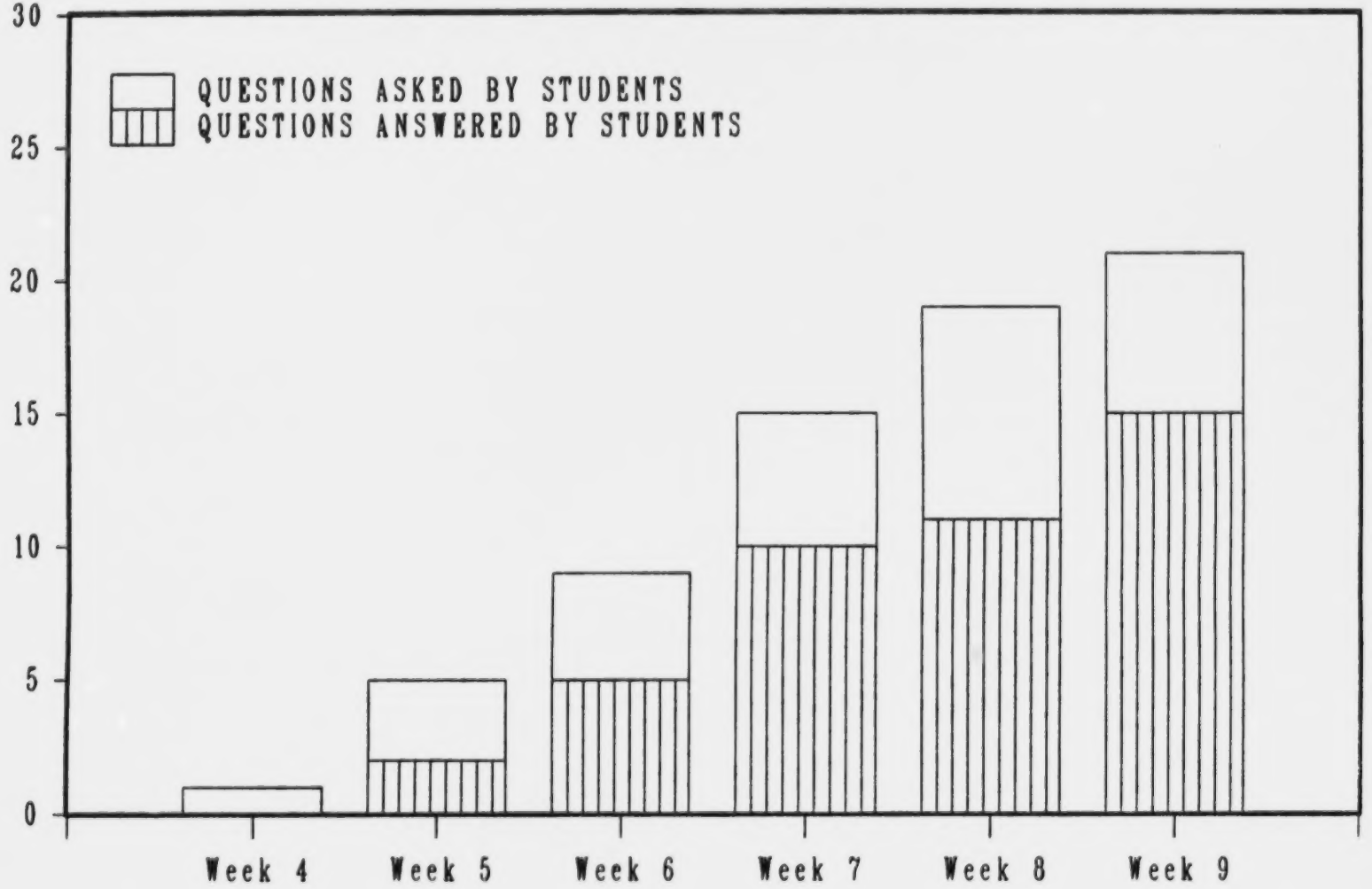
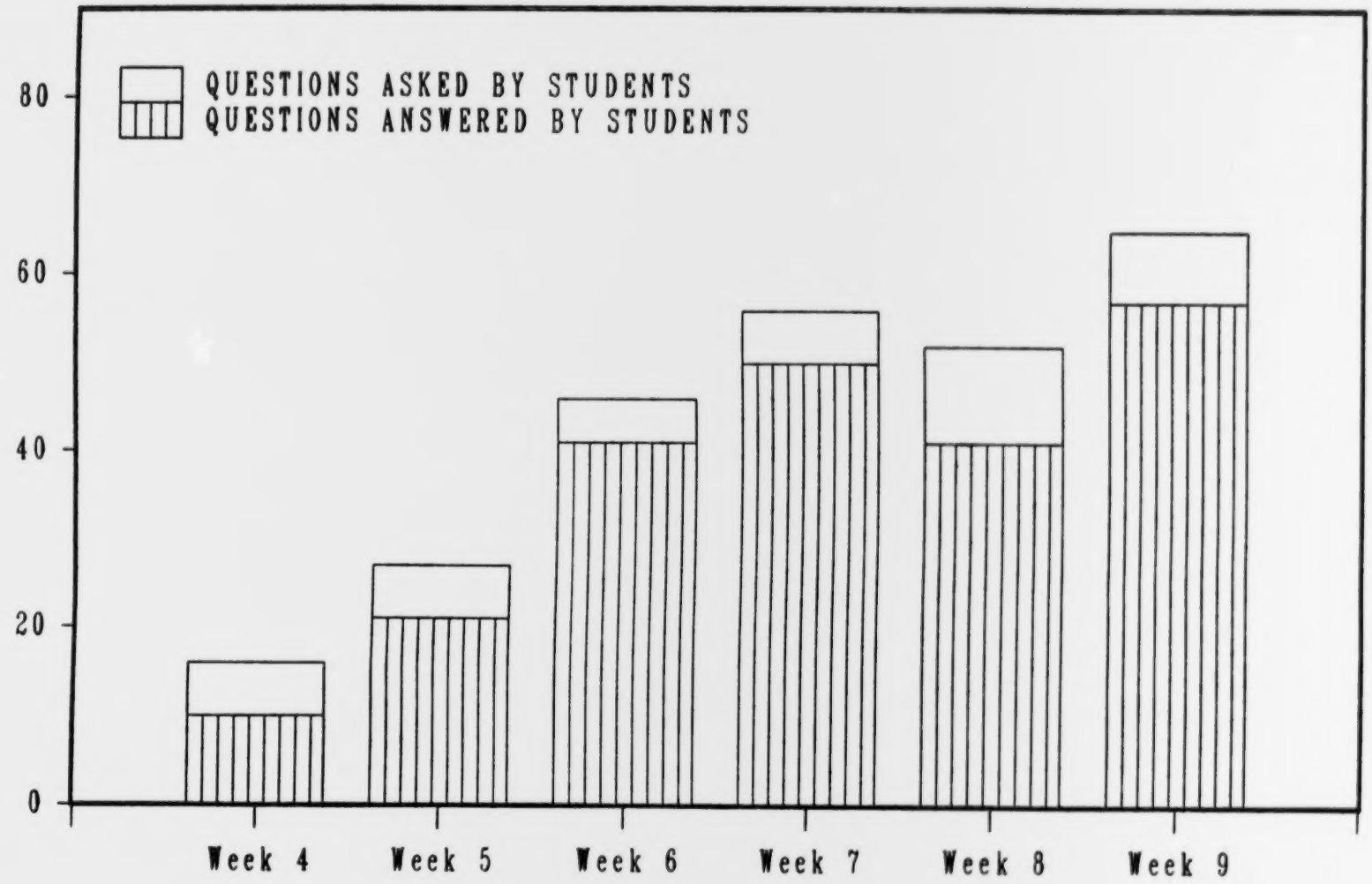
QUESTIONS ASKED BY STUDENTS
QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY STUDENTS
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7
Week 8
Week 9

CLASS C


30
25
20
15
10
5
0
QUESTIONS ASKED BY STUDENTS
QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY STUDENTS
NUMBER OF QUESTIONS
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7
Week 8
Week 9

13

TOTAL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QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY STUDENTS
NUMBER OF QUESTIONS
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60
40
20
0
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7
Week 8
Week 9

PSYCHOLOGY OF GROUP LEARNING

An Annotated Bibliography

Prepared by: Annette Magid

Anderson, Joseph D. "Working with Groups: Little-Known Facts that Challenge Well-Known Myths." SMALL GROUP BEHAVIOR V. 16, no. 3 (August '85) 269-83.

Group processes and outcomes are matched against research and practice. Research shows effectiveness of groups, yet practice dictates improper usage of group settings which causes student frustration.

Anderson, M. A. "Cooperative Group Tasks and Their Relationship to Peer Acceptance and Cooperation." JOURNAL OF LEARNING DISABILITIES 18 (Fall, '85) 83-6.

Group acceptance for disabled students was achieved through special guidance. Disabled students were placed in a homogeneously mixed classroom, but did not function well in groups because a feeling of group acceptance was needed.

Armstrong, Merilyn and David Boud. "Assessing Participation: Exploration into Issues." STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION v.81, no.1, pp. 33-44.

Provides method of assessing student participation in class discussion. ACP can produce artificial constraints on classroom.

Barbut, E. "Abstract Algebra for High School Teachers: An Experiment with Learning Groups." INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MATHEMATICAL EDUCATION IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY 18(March/April '87) 199-203.

Statistical analysis and philosophy for the study are clearly defined.

Fletcher, Ben C. "Group and Individual Learning of Junior School Children on a Microcomputer-based task: Social or Cognitive Facilitation." EDUCATIONAL REVIEW v. 37, no. 3 (Nov. '85) 251-261.

Groups of children showed measurably superior problem solving performance as compared to children working individually and silently on computers.

Fontes, H. C. "Small Group Work: A Strategy to Promote Active Learning." JOURNAL OF NURSING EDUCATION 26 (May '87) 212-214.

Psychology of group interaction discussed. Also offers task related activities to enhance group interaction.

Gemmill, Gary. "The Dynamics of Group Shadow in Intergroup Relations." SMALL GROUP BEHAVIOR v. 17, no. 2 (May '86) 229-40.

Examines psycholdynamic function within and between groups.

Glaye, Anthony. "Outer Appearances with Inner Experiences: Towards a More Holistic View of Group Work." EDUCATIONAL REVIEW v. 38, no. 1 (February '86) 45-56.

Assessment of a group of 11-12 year old pupils working with teacher to achieve tasks. Group inner dynamics analysed.

Heller, S. "Collaboration in the Classroom is Crucial if Teaching is to Improve, Educators Say." CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION 33 (March 11, '87) 17-18.

Focus on pschodynamics of groups on teachers and students.

Jackson, S. "Consultation and Colaboration Through Cooperative Goal Structures: A Pilot Study." COLLEGE STUDENT JOURNAL 20 (Spring, '86) 47-50.

Assessment of the psychological overlapping of behavior within a group structure during student teaching.

Johnson, Mary Canice. DISCUSSION DYNAMICS: AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1979.

In depth analysis of primary grade group interactions.

Johnson, R. T. "Comparison of Computer-Assisted Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Learning." AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL 23 (FALL '86) 383-92.

Computer learning was parallel to individualistic learning in this study. Group interaction promoted more material retention.

Lew, Marvin et al. "Components of Cooperative Learning, Effects of Collaborative Skills and Academic Group Contingencies on Achievement and Mainstreaming." CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY 26 (OCTOBER '86) 37-44.

Analysis of group interactive students versus individualistically instructed with an assessment of each's achievement.

Lew, Marvin et al. " Positive Interdependence, Academic and Collaborative-Skills Group Contingencies, and Isolated Students." AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL 23 (Fall '86) 476-88.

Psychological interaction between teachers who create group settings and their effect on the learning achievements of students within the group.

Logan, T. F. "Cooperative Learning: A View for the Inside." SOCIAL STUDIES 77 (May/ June '86) 123-6.

Study shows that the shift from competative to a cooperative classroom improves achievement, promotes social development and decreases tension between ethnic groups in 4th and 5th grade.

Mink, Oscar. "From Here to Internality: A Function of Learning Groups in Community College Classroom." MEDIA SYSTEMS SERIES IN CREATIVE TEACHING, 1979.

Part I: Social concept of behavioral change; psychology of internal and external loci of control.

Part II: Suggestions for use of group therapy in classroom.

Ndongko, Theressa and A. A. Agu. "A Study of Academic Achievement Related to Classroom Interactions in Nigerian Study Regions." INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF EDUCATION v. 31, no. 2 ('85) 205-221.

Some psychological assessment of students within group.

Nevin, A. et al. "The Impact of Cooperative Learning in a Regular Classroom." POINTER 28 (Spring '84) 19-21.

Study of group dymamics and its positive effect of student achievement.

Okebukola, P. A. "Cooperative Learning and Students Attitudes to Laboratory Work." SCHOOL SCIENCE AND MATH 86 (November '86) 582-90.

Assessment of group interaction in laboratory setting.

Parker, R. E. "Small Group Cooperative Learning-Improving Academic, Social Gains in the Classroom." NASSP BULLETIN 69 (MARCH '85) 48-57.

Social interaction of groups created better atmosphere for learning material.

Simonton, Dean Keith. "Intelligence and Personal Influence in Groups: 4 Nonlinear Models." PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW v. 92, no. 4 (October '85) 532-47.

Provides conceptual basis for curvilinear relation between intelligence and individual influence over group members.

Slavin, R. E. "Cooperative Learning: Can Students Help Students Learn?" INSTRUCTOR 96 (March '87) 74-6.

Assessment of possitive effects of peer interaction in a group setting.

Smith, C. W. "Collaborative Learning Groups." WOMEN'S STUDIES QUARTERLY 13 (Spring '85) 25-7.

Positive psychological interaction within learning groups.

Warring, D. et al. "Impact of Different Types of Cooperative Learning on Cross-Ethnic and Cross-Sex Relationships. JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY 77 (Fall '85) 53-9.

Non-Anglo groups were found more cooperative in group setting. Males had more tendency to drift from task at hand.

Watts, Mike and Dave Ebbutt. "More than the Sum of the Parts: Research Methods in Group Interviewing," BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL v.13, no. 1 ('87) 25-33.

Analysis focusing on outside factors relating to success of group interview and dynamics.

Wiener, H. S. "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: A Guide to Evaluation." COLLEGE ENGLISH 48 (January, "86) 52-61.

Measurement guidelines for group assessment.

Yager, S. O. et al. "Oral discussion, Group-to-Individual Transfer, and Achievement in Cooperative Learning Groups. JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY 77 (Fall, '85) 60-66.

Interaction of group to an individual showed possible enhancement of understanding of material to be shared.

Zahn, G. L. "Cooperative Learning and Classroom Climate." JOURNAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY 24 (Winter, "86) 582-90.

Psychodynamics of classroom setting and possitive reinforcement in groups.

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